

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Dan Maffei (D-NY)
Subcommittee on Oversight
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Joint Subcommittee Hearing
Reducing the Administrative Workload for Federally Funded Research

June 12, 2014

Mr. Chairman, I am happy we are holding a hearing on this important subject. While I am grateful to all the witnesses who are here today, I am particularly pleased that the Vice President for Research at Syracuse University, Dr. Gina Lee-Glauser, is able to join us. I know her well and value her advice and insight to inform my thinking about policy related to our Universities.

There are many who think that academics have it easy, but I can tell you that the academics I have known -- many of them at Syracuse University -- are among the hardest working people you will ever meet. Many professors have to juggle their teaching, their research and their University and community service. So when I hear from many researchers about the additional burdens of the "time and effort" reporting system, I am not the least bit surprised.

My hat is off to all the teachers and researchers who educate and innovate. It is hard work, and sometimes it does not receive the recognition it deserves, but it is essential to building the kind of country and world we want our children to inherit.

Regulations can certainly add to the burdens and hurdles of our researchers, but we have to weigh the benefits of those regulations against the costs. I want to thank Dr. Beinenstock and Dr. Sedwick for bringing their very thoughtful reports to our attention. Those studies provide plenty of examples of places where we can pare back on bureaucratic burdens to free up our professors to do the work we really want them doing.

In this, I think there is no disagreement across the aisle. We both want to reduce unnecessary regulations. That said, I find this hearing's timing to be unfortunate. We are receiving testimony on ways to reduce the burden on researchers just two weeks after the Committee finished marking up the National Science Foundation (NSF) authorization in the FIRST Act. That would have been a perfect opportunity to craft legislation that would have given statutory guidance to NSF about tackling reductions in regulatory burdens. Instead of providing meaningful guidance, the FIRST Act just tells Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to start thinking about doing something.

I also have to say that the FIRST Act itself creates new regulatory burdens, either directly or indirectly, on researchers. It also increases administrative overhead at NSF, which will drain funds away from research to support the new array of compliance requirements invented by the Majority.

Lastly, there is another area of administrative burden that the Committee contributes to. Reading through the testimony, it is clear that one of the largest time and energy sinks on researcher's time comes in the form of simply applying for grants. With 80 percent of the applications going unfunded, even very, very promising proposals are not funded simply because there are insufficient funds. Researchers spend an enormous amount of time chasing money from an increasingly smaller pot. The FIRST Act failed to provide an authorization that even matches the already-constrained level offered by the appropriators. By failing to provide more robust funding, the Majority consigns many researchers to hours of unfunded effort that will, four out of fivetimes result only in failure. That constitutes its own hidden cost on researchers.

So, I approach this hearing with a sense of gratitude that we can get so much good information on the record, but also aware of the irony in the topic and timing of this hearing.

Yield back, Mr. Chairman.